

The Piece of News

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Variety is the spice of vivid and effective teaching. Pupils claim that most teachers are boring. They just come, give a lesson, and leave. It is high time to stop this and move from teacher-centered to student-centered lessons.

I have always tried to include variety in my lessons. I tried several ways to do this, but they all proved a failure except one. This one I call “the piece of news.” It is 90% performed by students. It is done on a rota basis, i.e., students do it by turns, beginning with the first student sitting at the first table to the last student sitting at the last table. Then we move to the second row and finally the third row. When the last student has said his piece of news, we start again with the first student.

How?

Instructions are made clear at the very beginning of the year. The teacher explains to the students how to say their piece of news, what to say, and when to say it. So the pupils know beforehand when their turns will take place.

At the beginning of each lesson-after the date is written by a pupil-a student comes forward to the board and says whatever item he knows about the world, but in English. It is important that pupils prepare their piece of news beforehand and not ad lib. If it is short, it should be written on the board; if not, it is just spoken. (It should not be too long, so that it does not take too much time away from the lesson; the longer it takes, the shorter the lesson is.) Then the pupil goes back to his/her seat. When the piece of news has been corrected, the students write it on the last page of their lesson books.

The teacher intervenes only at the end: he explains new words, asks pupils to correct spelling mistakes, and has some of them read the piece aloud before writing it in their lesson books.

What to Say?

Students are completely free to say whatever they want to: proverbs, jokes, riddles, news items, short stories, games, literary works, translation, or quotations. This makes the pupils feel at ease. They will choose what they can say and what they want to say.

Why the Piece of News?

The piece of news aims to:

1. bring variety to the lesson and remove the shackles of routine;
2. expose students to speaking about everything in English: literature, economy, history, geography, etc.;
3. improve their speaking skill;
4. overcome their shyness and build self-confidence by speaking in front of an audience;
5. create a challenge for the students to try to say a piece of news better than the one(s) said by their classmates;
6. give them practice in translating from their mother language into English;
7. widen their (and the teacher's) knowledge of the world;
8. enrich their vocabulary;
9. reduce spelling mistakes by careful correction;
10. review grammar: pronouns, verbs, tenses, articles, etc.;
11. improve their writing techniques;
12. have the whole class participate.

Conclusion

I have been doing “the piece of news” for the past five years. It is always a smashing success, especially when students are awarded grades for it. I advise you to try it; the proof of the pudding is in the eating!